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Anti-Semitic Echoes Are Sounded in the U.S.S.R.

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In a closed society, the meaning of anything said or done is amplified by what it might mean beneath the surface. Thus the often-echoed Soviet phrase, about coincidences or vague reminders of the past, "it is not accidental." One reminder of the past that must have been startling to Soviet citizens was the recent formation of a Public Committee Against Zionism, made up of prominent Jews.

The committee has begun to function, holding a press conference to deny that Soviet Jews have any need or desire to depart the country. This committee may evoke, for some, memories of two earlier panels.

One was the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, also composed of prominent Jews and formed during World War II to encourage support for the Soviet war effort among Jews in the West. Most of its members were shot in various campaigns against Jewish "cosmopolitanism" and "Zionism" after the war. Some were charged with receiving instructions from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and the British Secret Service through their contacts with Jewish philanthropic organizations.

The other echo goes back to the group of prominent Soviet Jews being organized (according to widespread reports) just before Stalin's death to sign an appeal that Soviet Jews accept deportation to remote areas of the U.S.S.R. It was then—November 1952—that "Zionists" began to be used in the Soviet press as a codeword for Jews.

The background for the new committee is given in two articles in Leningradskaya Pravda that haven't received enough scrutiny in the West. They analyze the Zionists' "national arrogance and their national selfishness." The "national prejudices" that Zionism appeals to in Soviet Jews belong to a traditional repertoire: "We have Philistines, money-grubbers, consumers who strive to enrich themselves by any means." Soviet Jews emigrate to Israel to gain "a moneybags paradise."

It is maintained that there is such an entity as "international Zionism," which has "plans" and "tentacles," and carries out "creeping cultural infiltration into the countries of socialism," supported by the American "Zionist newspapers." The articles supporting the anti-Zionist committee even use images drawn from the biological obsession that characterized German National Socialism as opposed to Communism and even to Italian Fascism: Zionism's "unbridled militant chauvinism is dangerous and infectious, just like any kind of infection, like leprosy, like the plague."

It is the old story, the International Jewish Conspiracy, as you would have heard it in the cafes of Vienna in the '90s, or in some French officers' mess during the Dreyfus affair.

There is one major difference: The earlier talk emanated from parts of a society, but not directly from a central government that controls armies, university admissions committees, courts, prisons and border guards. Leningradskaya Pravda is the organ of the Leningrad Province Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, one of the three most powerful regional political organizations in the U.S.S.R. Responsibility for the periodical's contents rests with the province committee and its first secretary, Grigori Romanov, a politician important enough to have just been promoted to the Secretariat, the inner executive body of the Communist Party. Tass, of course, does not announce a committee against Zionism without a decision to support it at a high level. Interestingly, the chairman, David Dragunsky, is also the head of a military school that trains officers for the PLO, among other groups.

Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union is often regarded as an ineradicable survival of old Russian attitudes. Influenced by them it may be, but this misses the point that officially expressed anti-Semitism, from the time of the postwar campaigns against cosmopolitanism and Zionism, has always tended to be highly political. It is not a matter of mere attitudes or tastes, but of public policy, like the rest of the Soviet "nationalities policy"—a conception of the political and cultural role of the non-Russian peoples.

The new committee, its statements and the articles justifying it are likely to have definite practical consequences for Soviet Jews. A whole range of such decisions become easier now that there is a committee to call for them. They may affect three areas.

1. *Hebrew Teaching.* "Let's be frank. The appeal to Hebrew . . . is far from cultural, but is strictly political. . . . How does Zionism extend tentacles? . . . First of all, with the aid of religion, Hebrew. . . ." The assertion that the study of Hebrew is aimed against the Soviet state is relatively new. In accord with it, it seems that trials for the illegal teaching of Hebrew are being stepped up.

2. *Emigration.* The anti-Zionist articles argue that the function of Hebrew classes in the Soviet Union is to train "mercenaries," perhaps for the Israeli army who "hacked with their bayonets at the stomachs of pregnant women." Thus the restriction of emigration gains a new justification. Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union has been cut since 1979 almost to

nothing, but there was no formal explanation, no indication that the drop meant the end of emigration. First Deputy Chairman Zivs of the anti-Zionist committee, speaking at a news conference in Moscow, has just provided an interpretation of the drop in Jewish emigration that gives it a new meaning: "The absolute majority of those wishing to leave have taken the opportunity and left the country"—a statement tantamount to telling the Jews still in the U.S.S.R. that they do not wish to emigrate and had better not try. It seems to say that even if East-West relations improved, increased emigration wouldn't follow.

3. *Possible Trials.* When the articles justifying the new committee tell the Soviet public that British editor William Frankel "transmitted" to Jewish dissident G.I. Vasserman "certain instructions," they lay the groundwork for charges more serious than have recently been used—even that of working for foreign intelligence agencies against the Soviet state. The echo here is faint, but still menacing.

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